

COMMUNITIES TOGETHER INC



What does injustice look like through the eyes of a 12-year-old?

For Jordan Tolen, it looks like families separated, stereotypes repeated, and communities struggling to be treated fairly. And this spring, hundreds of affordable housing leaders gathered in Washington, DC heard her say it—clearly, courageously, and without hesitation.

Jordan, a resident at Hubbard Place in DC, was selected as the winner of Housing&'s children's essay contest, "What Does Injustice Look Like to Me?"

Standing before hundreds of adults, Jordan read her essay aloud during Housing&'s Annual Conference & Awards luncheon. She addressed racism, segregation, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the ongoing challenges faced by Black and Hispanic communities in the United States.

The contest was sponsored by Housing&, the region's leading affordable housing association. At the same conference, Hubbard Place's ownership — Somerset Development Company, a family-owned company known for its commitment to resident engagement—received Developer of the Year honors.

Jordan's essay reminded everyone in the room that young people are paying attention. They see injustice clearly. And when given the opportunity, they are more than ready to lead conversations about fairness, belonging, and change.

At Communities Together, that's what Youth Development is all about—creating spaces where young residents can build confidence, use their voices, and realize their potential. As Jordan Tolen wrote, "It's sad that we can't all come

together, as we share similar experiences.” **Sometimes, all it takes is one brave student and a roomful of adults willing to listen.**

Program Highlight: "Chats with Dr. Claudia"

“Chats with Dr. Claudia” began earlier this year after increased ICE activity left many residents feeling fearful and unsafe. While some in-person programming paused to protect residents, the emotional impact remains, creating a need for safe spaces focused on support, healing, and resilience.

Conceived by Communities Together Team Manager Bryana Solano, the virtual wellness series was created to test an idea—support for Latino residents navigating stress, anxiety, and trauma. **Communities Together partnered with Dr. Claudia Campos, a clinical psychologist, trauma specialist, and family therapist, to pilot a new kind of resident support group focused on emotional resilience and mental wellness.**

The sessions are designed as safe, welcoming spaces where residents can explore what stress, depression, and anxiety feel like in the body and techniques that can help reduce their impact. Attendees of “Chats with Dr. Claudia” have shared how meaningful it is to speak openly and feel heard.

At its core, the program is about creating space for connection, healing, and support. In moments shaped by uncertainty and fear, residents remind one another that they are not alone, and that caring for mental and emotional well-being is an important part of building strong, healthy communities.

Team Highlight: Ms. Toni Crockett

Behind Jordan Tolen’s award-winning essay were months of encouragement and support from Communities Together Youth Development Coordinator Toni Crockett, who works with Jordan at Hubbard Place.

Working full-time alongside residents and families, Toni helps create

opportunities for young people to grow in confidence, express themselves, and discover their strengths. Originally from Philadelphia, Toni earned her B.A. in Psychology with a minor in Sociology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Over the past eight years, she has worked with children and youth in behavioral health, college and career readiness, and out-of-school programming.

Toni believes deeply in nurturing the potential of young people—the future leaders, healers, creatives, and changemakers in our communities. **In the words of Niesha Tolen, Jordan’s mother, "Toni is a light in the building. I’m very appreciative of the opportunities Ms. Toni has brought in for my kids."**



Niesha, Jordan, and Ms. Toni

By the Numbers: Youth

Communities Together supports 1,760 children and youth under 18 across 30 communities!

Partnership Spotlight

This Mental Health Awareness Month, Communities Together continued testing and learning new approaches to emotional wellness programming for both youth and adults. Simply labeling something “mental health” can create barriers for participation. So we reframed sessions around wellness, stress relief, movement, and whole-mind-body health, concepts more welcoming for residents. We also tested different partners and formats, learning which programs residents connected with most deeply. Not every approach, or every partner, was prepared for the complexity of this work, making it even more important to identify the organizations that consistently showed up, built trust, and delivered meaningful results for residents.

Bzy Bplr

Through our partnership with Bzy Bplr, youth and adults participate in programs centered on emotional expression, movement, and self-awareness. Founder Jamelle Harris brings lived experience, compassion, and high energy to sessions that combine physical activity, mindfulness, and honest conversations about emotional well-being. Residents enjoy the program’s supportive and empowering approach.

Elevated Approach

Elevated Approach works closely with teens through coaching, yoga, meditation, and wellness conversations to help them better understand themselves and the pressures they face. Founder Latasha Jones creates spaces where teens feel calm, capable, and heard, while building practical tools for emotional resilience and self-expression.

Diversified Lifestyle Services

At Ft. Washington Manor, Diversified Lifestyle Services provides senior residents with access to professional counseling and mental health support. Their team—including licensed clinicians Antoinette Lancaster and Brittany Edwards—offers evaluations, counseling, and support for residents navigating mental health challenges and major life stressors. Diversified Lifestyle Services has become a trusted resource in the community, offering discounted services to make care more accessible.

Communities Together knows this: strong communities are built when residents feel seen, supported, and empowered to use their voices.

Whether through youth leadership opportunities, wellness programming, or trusted partnerships, this month's stories remind us that healing and growth happen in community.

Thank you for continuing to stand with residents as they lead, connect, and design stronger futures together. And a special thank you to [100WomenStrong](#) for their \$2,500 grant supporting our work with Madison House, a senior independent living community in Leesburg, VA.

The Communities Together Team

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